

Wesley Toolkit: *Ideas for innovative ministry wherever you are.*

Four Traps for Clergy When Moving to a New Congregation -

It's transition time in The United Methodist Church as many pastors receive new appointments and prepare to begin in new ministry settings on July 1. **Our prayers extend to all church leaders entering seasons of new ministry this summer!** Bill Wilson of the Center for Healthy Churches says that the arrival of a new minister can be a great opportunity to start anew for both the minister and the congregation — but only if the pastor steers clear of four common traps that can derail the new relationship.



- **The trap of expectations:** Unrealistic expectations, wherever they originate, are a set-up. They lead us away from God's design for us and God's church. And they trap us in impossible situations. A new minister will never succeed as the Messiah, and the congregation will soon expose its cracks and fissures, reminding everyone that it really isn't heaven on earth. Talking about this and anticipating the inevitable disappointments is an essential component of a healthy relationship between minister and congregation.
- **The trap of agendas:** The arrival of a new minister invites the congregation to imagine new possibilities. That is a wonderful and divine part of the opportunity. However, it is helpful to remember that all of us have agendas. Some are overt, some quite covert. Simply put, some people will see the coming of a new minister as an opportunity to advance a cause or seek a role that has been thwarted previously....Get up on a mental balcony in every meeting and during every conversation and ask what is really going on. Constantly ask: Why this? Why now?
- **The trap of talking:** Since clergy are seemingly paid to speak, the usual pattern is that they do — profusely, often, and repeatedly. Watch out for the trap of verbosity. The entry into a new congregation calls for a season of diagnostic rather than prescriptive conversations....In the early days, keep your ears wide open, your eyes wide open, and your heart wide open. There will be a time to speak the truth you bring to the situation, but initially talking should consist of words of invitation to others. Ask many, many questions, especially around the themes of heritage and hopes.
- **The trap of silence:** To be blunt, after 100 days on the job, a new minister had better have something to say. There are those who counsel a full year of observation before making any move toward active leadership. But the pace of our culture dictates a new reality. There is a shorter learning curve, so silence can be a trap for a new leader, should it go too long. It will be misinterpreted as a lack of leadership ability. The first 100 days offer a never-to-be-repeated opportunity for a new minister to define himself or herself and establish some trajectories for ministry. Pay attention to this time with careful and prayerful thought.

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